THE AERONAUT.

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That fable is a saith more
than thousand homilies.

Lord Byron.

It is a melancholy but at the same time a pleasing mode of spending an hour to contemplating the abodes of death, and in perusing the various inscriptions with which a burying ground is usually crowded. We behold the bloom of youth, the maturity of manhood and the decrepitude of age, promiscuously in one common sleep. The tyrant and the oppressed rest together in the dust. The grave knows neither distinction nor strife. The schemes of ambition, the bodings of revenge, and the fond anticipations of hope, are there consigned forever

to silence. The cold and noiseless worm fattens on the tenement that was once the abode of all that human nature could bestow. The eye of the fool, the enthusiasm of the hero, the devotion of the servant of God, are there alike unknown. In the grave, to borrow the emphatic language of scripture, there is none to give thanks. We are there instructed in the vanity of all earthly enjoyments. We are told how soon the lily of the valley may be cut down forever. We are warned that hope & promise may fade like the colors on the arch of heaven; that all that is delightful in anticipation, all that is alluring in enjoyment, all that is bright, and gay, and lovely, must bow before the storm of death. We are told how

— false the light on glory's plume,
As fading hues of even,
And love, & hope, & beauty's blooms

Are blossoms gather'd for the tomb,—
There's nothing bright but heaven.
MOORE.

The mind, kindling at the associations which the scene calls up, looks forward beyond this dim veil of mortality, and pierces the gloomy barrier that separates the invisible from the visible world. Lifted from earth, she follows the flight of angels and archangels into the eternal mansions of bliss. Earth and all her vanities are forgotten. The silent tomb, and the gnawing worm have no longer any terrors. A voice from the dark and dismal sepulchre invites the children of mortality to brighter and more substantial scenes; where the fever of expectation, the delusions of sin, the pangs of sorrow, shall cease to torment and distract the soul. That heart must indeed be lost to all sense of feeling, who can follow the corpse of a fellow being to his long home, who can gaze on the mournful memorials of the ravages of death, without

experiencing some sensations of that deep and thrilling awe which death alone can command.

From this let us turn to the consideration of the inscriptions generally placed on the tomb-stones. We are too often, it is to be feared, disgusted with the pulomeness of flattery, and the extravagant pomp of expression, placed over those, whose ~~life~~ lives, warranted it not, and who are now insensible to every earthly transaction. In the question of the poet —

Can storied urn, or animated bust
Back to its mansion call the fleeting breath?
Can Honor's voice provoke the silent dust,
Or Flattery soothe the dull cold ear of death?

GRAY.

To be striking, an epitaph should be short and simple; with no fine spun eulogium on the merits of the deceased, with no expressions which would rather tend to induce a

doubt in the mind of the reader, than confirm the conviction of his merits.

In a country burying-ground, to which occasion not long since called us, and in which there is every variety of epitaph, there was one, which we cannot forbear recording. It was on a rough, unadorned stone, the letters rudely carved, & the whole bearing the marks of total simplicity. The inscription was as follows:

There was something irresistibly affecting in this plain testimonial of the deceased;—And when we learned, that it was sculptured with his own hands, and directed to be placed over his grave, with no addition but the date of the year

in which he died, our feelings partook of a greater degree of awe and solemnity, than if the proudest monument had blazoned forth his virtues, and proclaimed his history. Many stones lay around this one, broken, & defaced but time seemed to have respected the rude but honest line which merely told that such a person once existed. And when we turned from the contemplation of this to that of a sumptuous monument, where every human virtue was attributed to a man whom friend & foe in life conspired to condemn, & who died blasphemy an involuntary shudder proclaimed how the sacredness of the place was profaned by the grossness of the flattering lie.]

If therefore such be the effect of these two kinds of epitaphs. it must follow, that the shorter &

the simpler the inscription is, the more influence will it have in solemnizing the feelings, and in exciting that interest which an epitaph is intended to produce. The eye that would turn indignantly away from the fulsome & elaborate tissue of flatteries, may be tempted to pause & gaze upon the humble monument with deep & lasting emotion. There are feelings we know not how intimately interwoven with every fibre of the human heart, which lead it to love more the simple silence of obscurity, than the proudest emblazonment that can deck the mouldering sepulchre. All is sadness and silence and darkness beneath; all is the prey of corruption & decay; and why should man attempt to erect above a spectacle so inconsistent with all that

rests below. The simple slab that is placed above the sod where the father of our country sleeps, and on which is merely engraven the name of "WASHINGTON," tells more than even pyramids could have done, were they sculptured over their whole surface with the actions he achieved. There is a sensation of moral sublimity in such epitaphs, which the storied urn, and the sumptuous monument fail to produce. The latter strip death as it were of its sadness, and please the eye rather than thrill the heart; but in the plain & unadorned memorial of the dead, we are shown how frail is life, how dark is death unillumined by a brighter hope. The tomb ought not to require the need of adventitious

circumstances to create an interest; it ought to strike its chilling awe at once to the heart, and pointing beyond these transitory scenes, call the attention to those enjoyments which death and the grave can never wrest away.

The following letter may perhaps serve to throw additional light upon the subject, and as it generally ~~[illegible]~~ coincides with our own ideas, we make no objection to inserting it.

To the Editors of the Aeronaut.

Gent.n

Taking a solitary walk one day, my footsteps turned involuntarily to a burying ground, where the bones of almost countless multitudes had been collecting for a long series of years. Many of the stones were worn &

defaced by long exposure to sun and shower, or lay buried in a rank growth of moss, at once concealing the name & the memory of those they were designed to perpetuate. Of those that I could decypher, the greater part was made up of undoubted adulation, and praises for virtues, which perhaps were never possessed, or if they had been balanced with their opposite vices, would leave risen to nothing in the scale. Of the modern ones, nearly all possessed these groundless praises; and a stranger from some other planet on reading their inscriptions, would with the innocent credulity of his nature be led to suppose that mankind were a race of almost angelic purity, but subjected by some fatal misfortune to the

attacks of death. I grew impatient of reading these unmeaning inscriptions, and was retiring from the scene, when just then I beheld the aeronautic vehicle which you had established for the reception of communications; a circumstance, which determined me immediately to address you on the subject, and to submit for your approbation a plan which I think might counteract the ~~evil~~ propensity every one has to praise a deceased relative on his gravestone, & to give him more virtues than he ever was able to possess.

I would therefore, gentlemen, propose, that a special court of enquiry be instituted under the

authority of government, whose business it should be to make inquisition into the life and character of every person who died. This court should be composed of four of the most learned, wise, prudent, & religious members of every town or community. No monument or tomb stone should be erected without their permission, and without an epitaph dictated by them. I would recommend the epitaphs in general to be as short as possible; but if the relatives of the deceased wished a more particular account, the court of Epitaphs should give as accurate an estimate of his character, as they could arrive at by every necessary enquiry. By this means, posterity would be certain that

the inscription they read was just;
and instead of turning away, as
now, with supercilious contempt,
the gaping traveller would be
led to pause, to revere the dust
on which he might tread, & to
consider whether his own life warranted
the eulogium which he might
behold bestowed on those who
had finished their career before
him.

Yet, gentlemen, great as are my
wishes to see this accomplished, I
fear it is a thing non licitum
fatis; that it is almost totally
impracticable in the present
condition of society, and that
we shall still be obliged to
bow to precedent, to follow the
multitude in their absurdities

still, and to acquiesce in epitaphs which we cannot contemplate with any real satisfaction. If you can hit upon any other plan which might ensure the alteration of this grievance (& a grievance it certainly is,) I doubt not but it might be carried into immediate execution. I would entreat you to consider the importance of such an alteration. It would give a different tone to public feeling, it would make men think more on that dark & narrow mansion where sooner or later all shall be laid; the churchyard & the cemetery would be the resort of the contemplative & the religious; their exertions in this

life would be quickened, & their hopes of futurity exalted. The simple homilies of that scene would speak to the heart with an irresistible appeal. In a word the advantages of such an alteration are incalculable; & that it may take place, is the sincere wish of

your friend
and admirer,

THEMIDOPHILOS.

Our worthy correspondent perhaps has rather carried his ideas too far, and is too sanguine in his expectation of the proposed advantages. Were the burying grounds ever so well regulated, still none but the contemplative

would frequent them. It requires a higher power than the one our correspondent proposes, to operate so effectually on the hearts of men and though God may sometimes employ that means to awaken the slumbering sinner, yet it more frequently happens, that upon the hardened conscience a walk through a burying ground has little even momentary effect. Still however we should wish to see an alteration in the style of monumental inscriptions, & shall, though we know not how it can be effected, join our fervent wishes for its accomplishment with those of Thanidophilos.

E.